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Testimony in Support of  
House Bill 551– Maryland Medical Assistance Program and Health Insurance - Coverage and Reimbursement of  
Telehealth Services  
Health and Government Operations  
February 10, 2021

The Rural Maryland Council **Supports** HB551 Maryland Medical Assistance Program and Health Insurance - Coverage and Reimbursement of Telehealth Services. On March 5, 2020 a state of emergency and catastrophic health emergency was proclaimed as COVID-19 began to spread throughout the state. As Marylanders were advised to avoid contact with others as much as possible to stop the spread of the virus, certain telehealth capabilities were expanded to require health insurance companies to reimburse health care providers who were providing telehealth services to patients that would have otherwise been covered in person. HB551 will extend the telehealth definition to include audio only and remote patient monitoring services and allow distant site providers to provide these services to program recipients from any location which the service may be appropriately delivered. The Council requests that these adjustments be made to safely provide adequate healthcare services to Marylanders who would possibly otherwise go without.

Rural Maryland is currently experiencing a shortage in healthcare providers, particularly in specialty areas, mental health and dental. In addition to having a lack of healthcare providers, Rural Marylanders tend to be both older and in worst health than their suburban counterparts. This puts many individuals of rural Maryland at a greater risk during the COVID -19 pandemic, making it less safe for them to leave their homes, especially to go to a high-risk location such as a medical facility.

House Bill 551 will allow for safer means of healthcare and provide easier access to healthcare for rural Marylanders. While telehealth is a more accessible option to many, those in certain parts of the state do not either own the proper materials for a telehealth visit or live in areas that lack proper broadband access to participate in a telehealth visit. By adding audio-only and remote patient monitoring services to the services covered under telehealth, it reaches those who would have been cut off from these services because of a lack of digital literacy or technology. Also, allowing Distant Site providers to provide services to a program recipient from any location increases the number of possible providers for each individual, allowing for more coverage and better health. This includes services for mental health and substance use disorders, which are much needed during these stressful times. According to the CDC, the amount of telehealth visits during the last two weeks of March 2020, rose 154% compared to the same time period from 2019. The increase may have been a result of the telehealth related policy changes made during that time.

The Rural Maryland council respectfully asks for your favorable support on HB551 Maryland Medical Assistance Program and Health Insurance - Coverage and Reimbursement of Telehealth Services

*The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) is an independent state agency governed by a nonpartisan, 40-member board that consists of inclusive representation from the federal, state, regional, county and municipal governments, as well as the for-profit and nonprofit sectors. We bring together federal, state, county and municipal government officials as well as representatives of the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to identify challenges unique to rural communities and to craft public policy, programmatic or regulatory solutions.*

“A Collective Voice for Rural Maryland”